

BRIEFER ARTICLES

WILLIAM HARRIS

(WITH PORTRAIT)

WILLIAM HARRIS was born November 15, 1860, at Enniskillen on Lough Erie, in County Fermanagh, northern Ireland, and was of Scotch descent. In 1881 he went to Jamaica, and left there for the first time in September 1920, when he came to the United States to receive medical treatment for an inflammation of the esophagus. He died at the home of his elder son in Kansas City, Missouri, on October 11, 1920.

After receiving his earlier education from tutors at home, and spending some months at Cowan's Nurseries, Liverpool, at the age of eighteen Mr. HARRIS went to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew to study botany and gardening. Before he was twenty-one he was appointed from Kew to be superintendent in the Botanical Department of Jamaica. In 1899 the value of his botanical work was recognized by his election to the Linnaean Society of London. In 1908 he became Superintendent of Public Gardens and Plantations in Jamaica, and in 1917 was made Government Botanist. In April 1920 he was appointed Assistant Director of Agriculture, retaining also the office of Government Botanist. In his several official positions he showed a high degree of administrative ability. He possessed not only the capacity for looking after essential details in carrying out plans, but had also the imagination necessary for planning new projects. During the war Mr. HARRIS served with untiring energy as secretary to the Advisory Board on Food Production.

Mr. HARRIS was a naturalist from boyhood. This was perhaps to be expected of one whose father was devoted to plants and gardening, and whose youth was spent amid the lakes and rugged hills about his birth-place. Throughout his life, in spite of many administrative duties, he remained an ardent and keenly observant field naturalist. Although his interest was primarily in plants, it also embraced animals. The writer, for example, recalls participating in a rather exciting chase of a 4 ft. iguana, which seemed ignominiously ended with the big lizard ensconced in a narrow mouthed pocket in a limestone ledge, but Mr. HARRIS volunteered to seize the ugly jawed creature by the neck and so to pull

it from its retreat. The animal was thus captured without being mutilated, and later became a much prized specimen of the United States National Museum. A similar enthusiasm, coupled in this case with marked endurance, was shown

by the more than 100 monthly trips made over the rough mountain trails from Cinchona to Blue Mountain peak, to secure records of the climatic peculiarities of this highest elevation in Jamaica. These records are probably the only ones yet made at any such elevation (7428 ft.) in the West Indies, or for that matter in all eastern North America. During these trips, as on his official journeys to other parts of the island, he persistently observed and collected the native plants.

The chief contributions to botanical science made by Mr. HARRIS were those to plant taxonomy and floristic geography. While the herbarium at Hope Gardens (it was at Cinchona until 1897) was under his care, that is, from 1908 to 1920, as well as for two previous decades while under the supervision of the Director of Agriculture, the Honorable William Fawcett, thousands of specimens were added to it, collected chiefly by Mr.

Harris himself. These plants were gathered not only during his official trips to various parts of the island, but also while on special expeditions to the less settled parts of Jamaica. Thus he accompanied expeditions sent by the New York Botanical Garden to the "Cockpit country" of central Jamaica in 1906; one to the Santa Cruz Mountains in 1907; around the whole coast and to the Blue Mountains in 1908; and one to the John Crow Mountains of eastern Jamaica in 1909. Dr. BRITTON, in recalling these expeditions, pays this tribute to HARRIS as a co-worker: "He was one of the most enjoyable scientific companions I have ever known, always cheerful, active, and original." Of the 8000 Jamaican species added to the herbarium at Hope during the 29 years



it was under the care of Mr. HARRIS, several dozens were new to science, while scores or probably hundreds were of species known elsewhere but hitherto unreported in Jamaica. Because of this wide experience in the field, coupled with his remarkably retentive memory of the appearance of any plant that he had once seen, he probably knew the characters and distribution of the vascular plants of Jamaica more thoroughly than they had been known by any earlier botanist. The herbarium built up under his care is perhaps the most important in the West Indies.

The publications of Mr. HARRIS include several considerable pamphlets published separately and numerous briefer articles and reports in the Bulletin of the Botanical Department of Jamaica. Most of these were on the economic and ornamental plants of the island. It is fitting that his services to botany should be commemorated in the names of the plants he discovered. This is done by the generic names *Harrisia* (Cactaceae) and *Harrisiella* (Orchidaceae), as well as by the specific names *Harrisii* or *Harrisiana* given to a score or so of ferns and seed plants, which will serve to remind future botanists of the part he played in West Indian botany.

It is due to the alertness and initiative of Mr. HARRIS that the Cinchona Tropical Station has been open to American botanists during the past 18 years. On each of the several occasions when Cinchona seemed likely to be diverted from the botanical service for which it is so eminently fitted, it was he who made the first move toward insuring its continuance as a botanical station. All American botanists who have worked in Jamaica have a very warm appreciation of the keenly intelligent assistance rendered them by Mr. HARRIS on every occasion. Those of us who may be fortunate enough to work in Jamaica again will miss his courteous and resourceful aid. Most of all will we miss his cordial welcome to the hospitality of Hope Gardens and the stimulating contact with an enthusiastic naturalist and an altogether delightful man.—D. S. JOHNSON, *The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.*